

# perspective on public opinion

prepared for the Nuclear Energy Institute

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## Public Support for Nuclear Energy Reaches Record High As Policy Leaders Voice Need for New Nuclear Power Plants

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Record high support for nuclear energy in March coincided with the government's announcement of the first loan guarantee for new reactors and strong statements about the need for more nuclear power plants from national leaders, including President Obama.

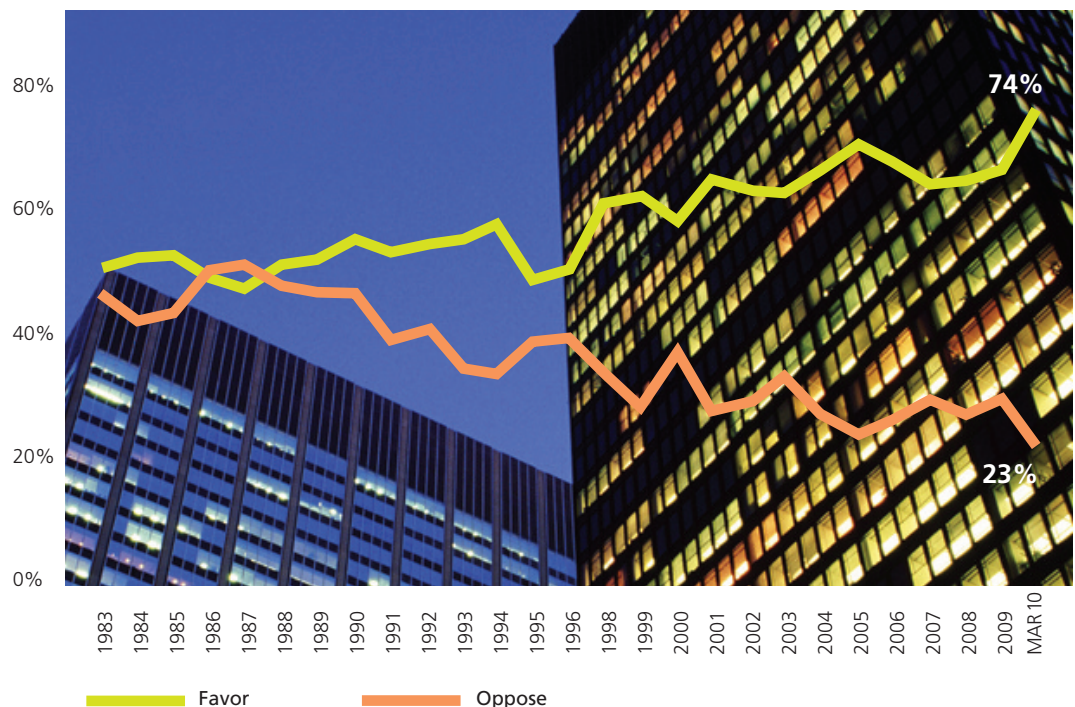
Perhaps due to these widely reported statements, Americans believe that President Obama supports new reactors more than Republicans or Democrats in Congress. The latest NEI public opinion tracking survey also suggests that more Republicans view nuclear energy through the lens of energy security, whereas more Democrats are considering the environmental and economic benefits that nuclear energy offers.

## Long-Term Transformation in Public Opinion

Three out of four Americans say they favor nuclear energy. The long-term transformation in public opinion on nuclear energy is striking: Those in favor moved from 49 percent in 1983, when the question was first asked, to 74 percent today. Those who "strongly favor" nuclear energy now outnumber those who are "strongly opposed" by more than three to one—33 percent strongly favor compared with 10 percent who are strongly opposed.

### Percent Who Favor and Oppose Nuclear Energy: Annual Averages Until 2010

"DO YOU STRONGLY FAVOR, SOMEWHAT FAVOR, SOMEWHAT OPPOSE, OR STRONGLY OPPOSE THE USE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY AS ONE OF THE WAYS TO PROVIDE ELECTRICITY IN THE UNITED STATES?"



Source: Bisconti Research, Inc. with GfK Roper. Telephone interviews with 1,000 nationally representative U.S. adults March 18-21, 2010, margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points. For full questions and answers, see [www.nei.org](http://www.nei.org).

## Democrats Embrace Clean Air, Jobs Benefits; Republicans Value Energy Security

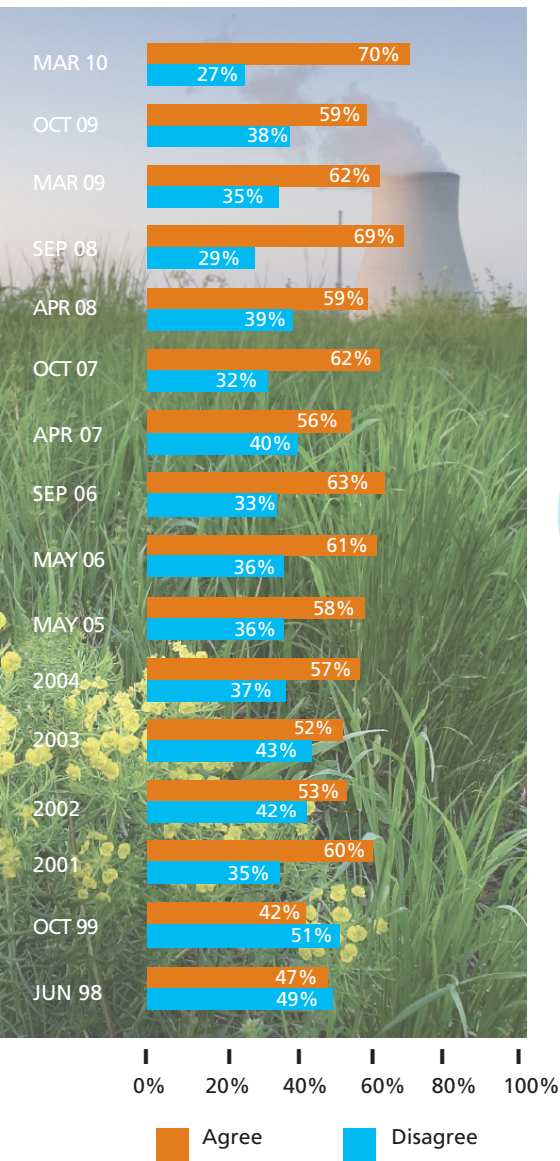
Although two-thirds (66 percent) of Democrats say they favor the use of nuclear energy, they are not as supportive as Republicans, 83 percent, or Independents, 75 percent. However, more Democrats than Republicans associate nuclear energy “a lot” with clean air—52 percent of Democrats compared with 30 percent of Republicans. More Democrats than Republicans also associate nuclear energy “a lot” with a solution to climate change (37 percent to 20 percent), job creation (43 percent to 32 percent), and economic growth (42 percent to 27 percent). Instead, 47 percent of Republicans and 37 percent of Democrats associate nuclear energy “a lot” with energy independence.

## Growing Support for New Reactor Development

Seventy percent support building nuclear power plants in the future, compared with 47 percent in 1998, when the question was first asked.

### Percent Agree/Disagree We Should Definitely Build More Nuclear Power Plants in the Future

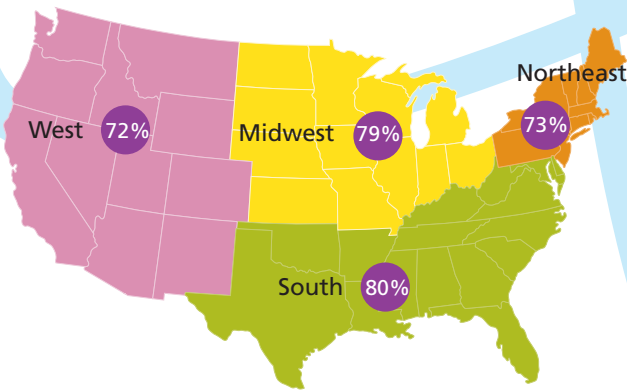
“PLEASE TELL ME IF YOU PERSONALLY STRONGLY AGREE, SOMEWHAT AGREE, SOMEWHAT DISAGREE, OR STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: WE SHOULD DEFINITELY BUILD MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS IN THE FUTURE.”



A record-high 77 percent said that a new reactor would be acceptable at the nearest nuclear power plant site. This high number reflects increases in all regions, with particularly strong acceptability in the South and Midwest.

### Acceptability of Adding a New Reactor Next to the Nearest Operating Nuclear Power Plant

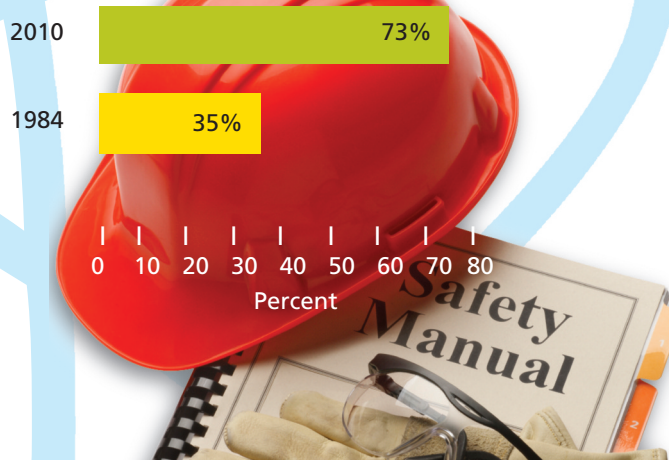
“IF A NEW POWER PLANT WERE NEEDED TO SUPPLY ELECTRICITY, WOULD IT BE ACCEPTABLE TO YOU OR NOT ACCEPTABLE TO YOU TO ADD A NEW REACTOR AT THE SITE OF THE NEAREST NUCLEAR POWER PLANT THAT IS ALREADY OPERATING?”



## Public Increasingly Confident in Nuclear Plant Safety

The public is increasingly confident in the safety of nuclear power plants. In 1984, 35 percent gave high ratings (5-to-7) to the safety of nuclear power plants on a 1-to-7 scale. Today that number is 73 percent—more than double—with just 10 percent giving nuclear power plants a low safety rating (1-to-3).

Perceived Safety of Nuclear Power Plants—Percent Who Gave High Safety Ratings



## Perceptions: Obama Most Supportive of New Nuclear Plants

Half of the public thinks that President Obama supports building more nuclear power plants, 29 percent think he is opposed, and 21 percent are not sure. Forty-six percent believe that Republicans in Congress support building more plants, and 37 percent believe that Democrats in Congress are supportive.

### Perceived Opinions about Building More Nuclear Power Plants

"PLEASE TELL ME IF YOU THINK THE FOLLOWING GENERALLY SUPPORT BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS OR GENERALLY OPPOSE BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS."

Support Oppose Don't Know

PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON WHAT PRESIDENT OBAMA THINKS OF BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR PLANTS:



PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON WHAT REPUBLICANS IN CONGRESS THINK OF BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR PLANTS:



PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON WHAT DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS THINK OF BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR PLANTS:

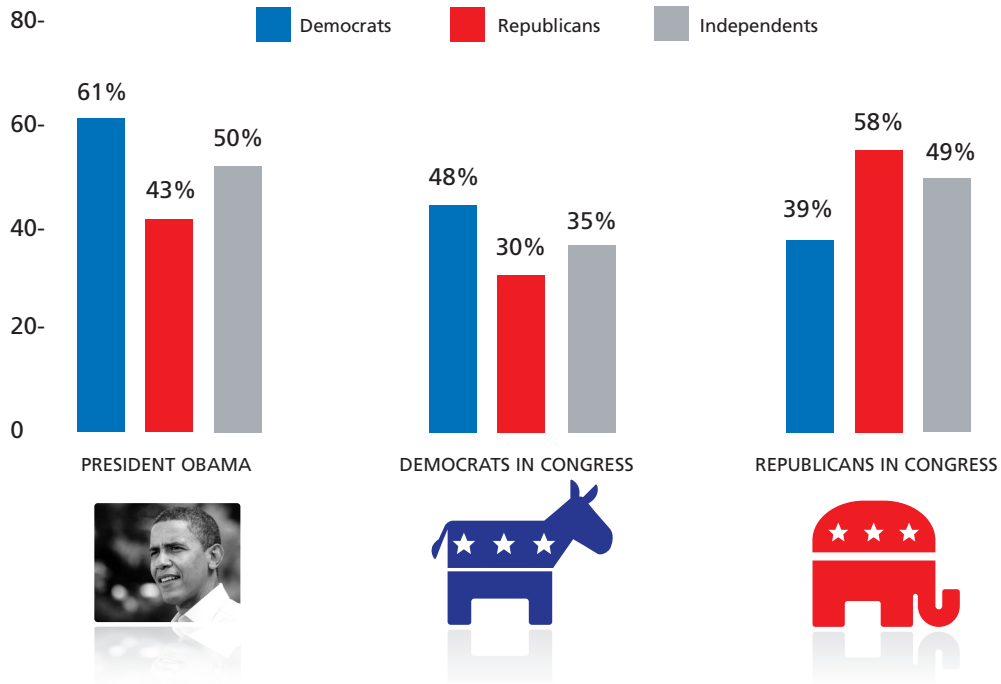


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## Democrats, Republicans Believe Their Representatives Are Most Supportive of New Nuclear Power Plants

Although Republicans are more favorable to nuclear energy than Democrats, both believe that their own party's representatives are the most favorable to building more nuclear power plants. For example, 61 percent of Democrats compared with 43 percent of Republicans believe President Obama supports building more nuclear power plants.

Percent Saying Each Supports Building More Nuclear Power Plants, by Political Party



## Perceptions of Public Opinion

A perception that the general public's opinion of nuclear energy is less favorable than one's own opinion has persisted for decades. In the latest survey, 42 percent said the American public supports building more nuclear power plants, 44 percent believe that the public is opposed, and 14 percent are unsure. This perception contrasts with 74 percent in the same survey who actually favor the use of nuclear energy and 70 percent who believe electric companies should definitely build more nuclear power plants in the future.

### Perceptions of Public Opinion

"PLEASE TELL ME IF YOU THINK THE AMERICAN PUBLIC GENERALLY SUPPORTS BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS OR GENERALLY OPPOSES BUILDING MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS."

